



Prepared remarks of Lance Gough, Executive Director, Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

Honorable members of the Subcommittee on Elections, good afternoon.

My name is Lance Gough, and I am the executive director of the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago. Chairwoman Lofgren, to begin, I want to thank you and the members of the subcommittee for this opportunity. I was asked to talk with you about Best Practices and Recommendations for this Hearing on the Importance of Poll Workers.

In Chicago, for a typical election we have to secure the services of 14,000 Poll workers to cover 2,600 precincts in more than 1,900 polling places. For the last few elections, we've had virtually every polling place staffed and open on time, and no one has had to go to court to extend the election hours in recent memory.

That said, I would like to begin my remarks with a scene I am sure we all know from our experiences back home.

On Election Day, we walk into a polling place. It may be in the office of a grain elevator in a farm community. Or a school gym in a growing suburb. Or the lobby of a towering high-rise in a city like Chicago.

And no matter which one we use, we will find the same human resources on the scene. There will be five people serving as local poll workers. Each one probably took a half-day or one-day course. In fact, one of these poll workers might have come to vote at 6 a.m., and was asked by the other poll workers to help out, and was sworn in on the spot.

When you think about it, these people form the backbone of our American democracy. It's amazing. I think if it like setting up shopping for the Friday after Thanksgiving – but all of the clerks had a half-day training, none of them have worked since last year, none of them have more authority than any of the others – and in most jurisdictions of the United States, they have new self-check-out machines that the voting consumers have to use on their own.

Across these United States of America, there are millions of poll workers. They were trained for a half day. They work a 15- to 18-hour day, usually for a paycheck of \$100 to \$150.

To make all of that work requires the three “Ps”:

- **Planning**
- **Partnerships**
- **And Prayer. Just kidding. Even though I say a few prayers, the third element is plenty of resources.**

First, you must have planning. In small jurisdictions, you may have five to 10 core managers who then have to grow to have 100 poll workers on Election Day. In big jurisdictions, we grow from a core staff of 200 to 16,000.

The core group of year-round election system managers must work behind the scenes all year so that the inevitable surprises – court rulings, equipment issues – are easy to overcome during that last four-week stretch before Election Day.

Managers must make copious notes on what they see during the current election cycle. Know what you want to change in election equipment before someone raises a question. Make sure that all of the changes clear through state and federal certification. Seek any legislative changes you might need. If you suddenly shift the primary, like we did in Illinois, to the first week in February, do a mailing to all of your poll workers with return cards – to make sure they’re not going to Florida or Arizona on one of the coldest weeks of Chicago’s winter.

Planning also means building instructional systems and materials that will help your 14,000 poll workers understand the rules and know what to do to keep the polling place functional and running smoothly. We have samples of our 72-page Judge of Election Handbook for 2007. I would have brought the 2008 edition, but for the fact that we are still waiting on the Governor and the Legislature to be sure pending legislation becomes the law.

The next key is partnerships. You must communicate steadily with political leaders, community groups, the schools and community colleges, non-governmental organizations, civic organizations, leaders of ethnic groups, religious leaders. Everyone likes a steady flow of information. No one likes a surprise.

Our recent municipal elections marked one of the few times that we did NOT, I repeat, did NOT have to put out a call for more poll workers in the weeks before Election Day. One key reason was forging a valuable relationship with the Mikva Challenge. We have always had a strong showing among student poll workers – those who can serve as a poll worker even if they’re not old enough to register to vote. Under Illinois law, these honor-roll high school seniors must be recommended by their principals and must complete training. Once they do, they have the same authority as the other poll workers.

This is a wonderful opportunity for young adults to become engaged in the franchise. This year, with the help of the people at the Mikva Challenge, we shattered the old record for student poll workers. We had more than 900 high-school poll workers. Under pending legislation, that program will grow to include high-school juniors. Then, we might be able to retain the services of these students for more than one election.

Next, we prepared for the change in election equipment under HAVA by hiring tech-savvy college students to serve as Polling Place Administrators or “PPAs.” Their sole job was to be on hand if there was any technological issue. Through a partnership with People for the American Way, we had 1,900 tech-savvy college students – one for every polling place. And the transition to the new equipment has gone rather smoothly.

Lastly, all of this requires **plenty** – plenty of resources. We are fortunate to have the support of elected and appointed officials and both the Republican and Democratic committeemen. All of them have been willing to support appropriating adequate resources to help make sure our elections run smoothly.

The PPA program will cost \$300 per college student for training and service, but they know that is money wisely spent to prevent any sort of balloting crisis.

Likewise, it’s costly to do our pre-election mailings to voters to alert them to coming changes in the Election apparatus. Even a simple post-card mailing will cost more than \$400,000, almost entirely postage. A brochure costs even more.

But those mailings, and our many partners in the print and electronic news media, helped the voters know what to expect come Election Day.

We are continuing on that same course, because this will be the first Presidential Election since we began using optical-scan and touch-screen equipment. Based on historic turnout trends, that means many voters will be using these systems for the very first time in 2008.

We will use our same strategy of:

- **Planning**
- **Partnerships**
- **Plenty of Resources.**

With that, I look forward to answering your questions.